

## School Social Work Association of America Resolution



### School Social Worker Staffing Needs

SSWAA recommends that the ratio of Master of Social Work (MSW) level school social workers to students be 1:400.

Social, emotional, and behavioral problems are creating barriers to educational success for an increasing number of students. According to the National Mental Health Association, fewer than one in five of the 17.5 million children in need of mental health services actually receive the needed services. SSWAA believes the number of school social workers must be significantly increased in order to adequately and appropriately meet the needs of all students.

In order to more effectively assist students' focus on learning, remove barriers to achievement, decrease school violence, and improve the school climate for all students and staff, SSWAA supports a maximum ratio of one school social worker to 400 students (1:400). SSWAA believes adherence to this maximum ratio is essential if school social workers are to provide effective services and be viewed as a valuable member of the school's interdisciplinary team.

The scope of responsibilities and involvement of the school social worker is broad:

- Prevention and intervention services (strengthening school systems, fostering healthy climates)
- Assessments (special education evaluations, functional behavior, manifestation determinations, behavior interventions, mental health)
- Counseling services (individual, group, and family counseling; alcohol and drug counseling)
- Consultation (classroom observations, teacher consultations, case conferences, consultation with administration on program needs)
- Parent and community liaison (home-school-community liaison, engaging community in student success, home visits)
- Reducing violence (child abuse recognition and reporting, crisis intervention, peer mediation, anger management, bully proofing)
- Referrals and Collaboration (linking students to community resources, collaborating with outside agencies)
- Assuring compliance with federal mandates (504 staffing, IDEA compliance, Medicaid documentation)
- School involvement (classroom presentations, school-wide assembly presentations, participation in school committees)

- Training (social skills training, parenting skills, staff in-service, parent-teacher organization training)

In addition, school social workers are responsible for the planning, evaluation, and documentation associated with all of the above.

SSWAA recognizes that many school social workers are currently responsible for several times the recommended number of students, and this demand severely impacts their ability to provide adequate services to all students. In addition, SSWAA recognizes that some situations will require a lower staff-to-student ratio than the suggested 1:400 ratio. The optimal staffing ratio is dependent upon a number of variables such as the socioeconomic status of the community, the resources of the educational system, and the characteristics of the student population: factors that can converge to seriously compromise delivery of services to students. Therefore, in situations where a large percentage of the school social worker's caseload is comprised of students with heightened levels of needs or risk (e.g., physically challenged, developmentally delayed, economically disadvantaged students, or at-risk students), a significantly lower staff-to-student ratio is required in order for the school social worker to effectively deliver needed services.

Historically, ratios of school social workers to students were published by the National Council of State Consultants for School Social Work Services (*School Social Work Journal*, Fall 1981, Vol. VI No. 1) and included in the 1992 NASW Standards for School Social Work Services (Appendix A, pp. 18-19) and provided as guidelines to school districts as they considered staffing needs. SSWAA is committed to ongoing exploration of the ratio issue in the interest of determining best practices based on research and collective practice wisdom.

Revised and Approved by the SSWAA Board of Directors  
August, 2005